

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

SHOULD THE U.S. PUT BOOTS ON THE GROUND TO FIGHT ISIS?

THE BROOKINGS DEBATE:
AN EVENING EXCHANGE OF IDEAS

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Moderator:

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Against Intervention:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good evening, everybody. I'm Martin Indyk the executive vice president of Brookings. On behalf of everyone here at Brookings I want to welcome you to the first Brookings debate -- #Brookingsdebate. I want to thank our audience in the room and those viewing on line for joining us this evening. It's very important that all of you vote and that's how you do it. We need you to vote early -- that is now and then we'll invite you to vote after the debate. The big question we have for ourselves in this as opposed to the question you have to answer here is whether this Brookings debate can actually change minds. So this is the way we will establish it. Brookings is in the ideas business. Ideas that impact policy and improve governments. As an institution we don't take positions on any policy issue, but we do steadfastly defend the independence of our scholars and their right to advocate for their particular points of view provided of course that it's scholarly based. Convening events among top policy thinkers and practitioners has always been a fundamental part of our DNA at Brookings.

And as Brookings heads into our centennial year, yes believe it or not we will be 100 years young next year, we wanted to promote a smart conversation on big ideas amongst independent experts. Tonight we are launching this new debate series that's not just what we hope will be an interesting and thought provoking way to spend an evening, but also a way to hear top minds debate the most important issues of the day. We'll be introducing other innovating ways to showcase what a second century Brookings is going to look like. We hope you'll be active participants in those efforts as you are going to be this evening.

The issue at hand tonight is perhaps the biggest foreign policy question we face today, whether the United States should put boots on the ground in Iraq and/or Syria to fight the Islamic state or ISIS. Tonight we've got the treat of engaging with some

of the top minds in this business in Washington including Senator Chris Murphy who's just come down from the hill to join us and we are very grateful Senator for your participation in this debate. Without further ado we're going to get the show started. To moderate this debate this evening we're very glad that Indira Lakshmanan from Bloomberg News has agreed to take on that role. Indira covers foreign policy from Washington from Bloomberg News. She's traveled around the world with Secretary of State John Carrey, where I used to see her, the back of a plane and with Hillary Clinton. From 2009 to 2010 she wrote the page 2 foreign affairs column from Bloomberg and the overseas edition of the New York Times.

She's reported from 80 countries around the world. Before moving to Bloomberg she was the Boston Globe's Asia Bureau Chief based in Hong Kong and Shang Hai covering North Korea and Afghanistan. She's also chronicled China's transformation after the death of Dung Shai Ping. And she's been the Boston Globe's Latin America Bureau Chief in Columbia covering Mexico to Argentina. She joined Bloomberg in 2008 when she was covering the US Presidential campaign traveling with the main presidential candidates. She started her career at the great NPR where she worked on the foreign desk and covered the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Chile, magna cum laude from Harvard University and also a graduate student at Oxford University, therefore very well suited to conduct this debate. Indira, please.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Good evening everyone. Welcome to the very first Brooking Debate. It's really exciting to be part of this and thank you so much Martin for inviting me. On behalf of everyone at Brookings I really want to thank you for coming in the room and we have a more than sold out audience here and standing room in the back which is really great plus more of you who are online with us. As Martin has told you already tonight we are going to be debating one of the most important and divisive issues

in American politics – in foreign policy today about whether the U.S. should put boots on the ground to fight ISIS. And as Martin explained in order to gauge the strength of tonight's arguments we really need to hear from you both before and after the debate so that's why your voting is so key and if you haven't done it already get out your phone or computer. The pre-debate poll is going to be open for about five more minutes and you can use the online web link which is right underneath the video player or you can text to 22333.

So tonight's debate is going to be really structured and fast moving, that's the idea, so you are going to hear five minute opening statements from each of the panelists and gentleman you are each only going to have five minutes for those so please don't make me start the Oscar's music and get the cane to get you off stage. And after the opening arguments we are going to get into the heart of the debate where I'm going to moderate a back and forth discussion among the debaters followed by a chance for the audience to participate. We're going to take as many questions from you as we can also online please Tweet to us your questions using the hashtag #Brookingsdebate and we're going to try to take as many of those questions from Twitter as we can.

After the Q & A voting is going to open again while we listen to the final closing statements from each of our debaters. And this is very important in order to get the voting tallied so we can tell you what the results are tonight, we are going to have to end the voting at the moment that the final speaker ends his statement. You really have to make your decision during that fourth person's remarks and vote before we cut him off. I really like the video that was sort of a cool way to set this up, but to just sort of put it in context a little bit more about ISIS. By now everyone in this room and watching online has heard and seen about the images of terror that ISIS has inflicted not only in the middle-east but by spreading its message around the world. The group now as we know

has a major stronghold in both Iraq and Syria, controlling over half of Syria and a significant portion of Iraq.

But remember that just a year ago, before June of last year really many people had never even heard of ISIS, most people who were not area experts or counterterrorism experts had even heard of this group that at the time was somewhat obscure, but they catapulted into the international spotlight, not only by overrunning Iraq's second biggest city, Mosul, but also with these horrific images that they spread online of beheadings, of foreign hostages and also more recently the beheadings of 21 Coptic Christians in Egypt and so overrunning communities, enslaving the Yssidies, we're really familiar now with all of their terror and President Obama as many of you will recall last September said, "Okay, enough and began with the airstrikes in Syria and Iraq backed in either word or in deed by a coalition of more than 60 countries. Of course the United States has been taking the major lead in that.

Now we're up to a situation where the U.S. has about 3,000 troops in Iraq, not in Syria who are advisors and trainer, but we still don't have anyone who's spotting for the airstrikes on the ground that we know of and the President recently announced that he was going to send another 450 U.S. Troops. So for the purposes of this debate tonight boots on the ground to combat ISIS means a significant increase in current levels of U.S. combat forces with the mission to fight ISIS head on only in Iraq and Syria. ISIS of course has it's presence elsewhere in the world and it has chapters as far away as Yemen, Egypt, Nigeria but for tonight's debate we are talking about U.S. military action in Iraq and Syria.

The polls are going to close shortly, this is your last chance to vote, and can I please ask the panelist to come onto the stage. We have four incredible panelists here and they all have such long and impressive biographies that I was instructed not to

read them all aloud, that you have them in your packages because I was going to take up too much time otherwise, so please do refer to them.

Arguing in favor of U.S. intervention will be Michael Doran and Michael O'Hanlon right here. Arguing against intervention will be Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Jeremy Shapiro so remember you have those full impressive bios in your handout. So, let's begin we are first going to hear from Michael Doran who's a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute specializing in middle-east policy and a former Bush Administration official. Take it away Michael.

MR. DORAN: Thank you, thanks very much, it's great to be back here at Brookings and it's an honor to debate this topic in the inaugural debate series. In June 23, 2013 Sarah Palin was asked for her preferred solution to the Syrian Civil War and she said let Allah sort them out. And I call this the Palin doctrine and my opponents here Senator Murphy and Jeremy Shapiro are adherents of the Palin doctrine. The fact of the matter is to a certain degree the President is as well. The President clearly if we've watched his body language on this, he clearly has not wanted to commit troops and has done everything that he can to not do it, but circumstances have forced him to take ever greater steps toward intervention. And I think we have to ask ourselves before we accept the Palin doctrine we have to realize that built into it is one of two assumptions. A) That we don't actually have vital interests in the middle-east. I think we have to start from this, do we have vital interests in the middle-east and I think everyone is going to agree of course we have vital interests and what are those? They are the same ones that we've been talking about for the last 20 years. We want to fight global terrorism, we want to prevent terrorist safe-havens, we want to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, we want the steady flow of oil at stable prices and so on and so forth. That's question 1) because if we are not willing to take military action in

order to improve the situation on the ground then that means we don't have vital interests that we really care about or it means that somehow we think that if we don't take action that events are going to just sort themselves out in some way that is amenable to our interests.

President Obama himself has suggested that this is the case and some of his top officials have suggested that sooner or later the middle-east is going to reach an equilibrium. The Saudi's and the Iranians are going to cancel each other out. [sic] Hezbollah and Al Qaida are going to cancel each other out, the ISIS and Iraqi state are going to cancel each other out, but clearly that is also false and we can see it. Since 2011 the situation has gone bad to worse with repercussions that I think everyone in this room is familiar with, we've got 250,000 dead in Syria, we have half the population uprooted. Half the population uprooted and the population will never, ever go back to its homes which means it's going to be a hot bed.

Those refugee camps are going to be hotbeds of extremism. And also we have ISIS right at the center of the Arab World. We have a terrorist safe haven and I think by now since we have nearly a year of U.S. military action against ISIS. We can see that the strategy is not working and it's not going to work unless we take action. All of us here, I think all four of us know that we do not want to have a massive U.S. intervention. Another George W. Bush style 150,000 U.S. Troops invading Iraq. In order to prevent that however and to safeguard our vital interests we have to have allies who will help us with this task. And the problem with the Palin doctrine is that it alienates all the allies that we need. Because if you look closely at the demographics on the ground you see it's not just we need allies -- people who in some circumstances are willing to pick up a gun against ISIS we need Sunni allies because the population that is -- the population and the area that ISIS is taking over in this area from Baghdad to Damascus

is made up of Sunni Arabs.

And so what we need is we need forces on the ground that capable of helping us take and hold territory, to offer the local population the basic security that it needs in order to expel ISIS from the region. We have experience of this, we did this during the surge from 2007 to 2009 and we learned that if we embed with the local population and we provided security that it will help us against the extremists. The problem is our posture and the region right now is alienating all of the Sunni's. All the Sunni's in the middle-east believe that we are aligned with Iran. They believe this for many different reasons, but the fact of the matter is that on the ground in Iraq we are serving as the Air Force of the Shiite militia's run by Iran and in Syria we are carrying out a policy that refuses to take the fight to Assah. Until we embed with forces on the ground and create a coalition of Sunni's and show the region that we are willing to take the fight to them we will not get the allies that we need.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay, I think I might have to give 20 extra seconds to one of the two of you. All right, next up, thanks a lot, Michael, appreciate that. We are going to be hearing from Senator Chris Murphy, Senator Chris Murphy as you all know is the Junior Senator from Connecticut, he serves on the foreign relations committee, the appropriations committee and other very important committees. Please, Senator, come tell us. He is someone in this room who has a good chance to make a difference as well. So, that's a good reason.

SENATOR MURPHY: I'm going to switch sides because I don't want to be associated with Sarah Palin. That swayed me just in and of itself. Thank you very much to Brookings for bringing us together. Tough to do this in five minutes. I'm going to dispense with the pleasantries and try to get right down to it. No greater obligation, no greater responsibility as a United States Senator, as a congressman in deciding whether

or not to commit U.S. men and women to a fight abroad. Doesn't get more serious than that. Why do we know that? Because every single one of us who's been in Congress over the last several years has had to go to way too many funerals for men and women who didn't come back, sitting with families who've grieved. And so at the outset you have to be absolutely certain about what your objective is and I think we should have a conversation here about whether our objective here is to defeat ISIL or whether as the United States our objective is to degrade them to the point where they are no longer a threat to us.

I would argue that latter rather than the former. I think if you believe the former then you are talking about 100's of 1,000's of American troops there to get that job done. But then you have to be absolutely sure that the insertion of American troops is going to get you closer to that outcome, not farther away and that there is no other way to get to your objective because troops, the prospective death of Americans fighting for us should be your last resort. I don't think that Americans conjure up troops in large numbers in the middle-east qualifies either of those tests and let me tell you three quick reasons why I don't believe that to be so. First, I just don't believe in the feasibility of the mission.

Now, if the mission is just putting in enough troops to assist and train the Iraqis then we have 10 years of experience to tell us that we are not good at doing that. If 100,000 American troops on an average annual basis couldn't train the Iraqi military to the point that they wouldn't run from ISIS when they marched on places like Mosul, how is a couple thousand additional American troops going to be able to try to correct for the mistakes of a decade of mistakes? Second and if you believe that actually our confidence there is to be the forward facing presence against ISIS then there is nothing about the last 10 years that tells you that we can accomplish that mission either.

Now yes if we put 100,000, 200,000 troops we might be able to win for the period of time that we're there. But it accomplishes all sorts of other goals that are counter to long-term American interests. What our own intelligence community tells us is that when there are larger numbers of American Troops in the middle-east it becomes the cause celeb for the international terrorist movement. You want the greatest recruitment tool for ISIS globally? Put tens of thousands of more American troops in the middle-east. That's a calling card for ISIS as they are trying to recruit against us.

Second I'd argue that putting combat troops in the middle-east to fight ISIS frustrates rather than advances our most important goal which is political reconciliation. Now ISIS exists in a political and economic vacuum, not a military vacuum. And the argument here goes that so long as a body has U.S. troops to rely on to keep ISIS at bay, to keep them out of Baghdad then here is no pressure for him to really step up and do the things necessary to create an inclusive government.

Why do we know that because that's the story of the surge. The surge temporarily gave military stability while allowing for Maliki to very quietly marginalize in a way that led the country to fall apart. Look what happened in Ramadi. Ramadi got over run by ISIS for a variety of reasons but one of them was that Maliki and his government were unwilling to stand up a Sunni military. Why because they saw it to be a threat to themselves. If the United States just steps in and say we'll fight your battles for him, for you, then there is no incentive to actually create an inclusive fighting force that can sustain the test of time.

And then lastly by viewing this simply through a military prism we provide disincentive for us to invest in the actual tools that are going to provide for long-term economic stability. Here's the quote that I just heard, "If we don't take military action, then we don't have vital interests." That presupposes that the only way to advance you

interests is through military action, that's ridiculous. In the case of the surge we gain stability yes because we have a lot of troops, but also because we handed out bags of cash throughout the middle-east, throughout Iraq to tribal Sunni leaders and about their allegiance to the central government.

Now I'm not arguing to do that again but it speaks to the fact that if you have a true political and economic program on the ground that are giving economic solutions to Sunni tribal leaders then that give them another reason to walk away from ISIS to the central government. There are other ways to fight ISIS than simple deployment of American combat troops. I hope that that's a big part of our discussion today. I look forward to the debate. Thanks for having me.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Thank you and so timely too. All right. Thank you, next up we have Michael O'Hanlon who's going to argue in favor of intervention. Mike is co-director of the Brookings Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence and he's also director of research on foreign policy at Brookings. Take it away Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you Indira, thank you all, Senator Murphy, it's an honor to have you with us and I respect very much the resistance and reluctance of the other side here in the debate. I agree with probably 90 percent of what they've said and are going to say. But let me say why I think we have to do some important things that are more than what we are doing right now and I'm going to take in my opening remarks the case of Iraq. This is an integrated battlefield, ISIL or ISIS is a threat throughout much of the region, not just Iraq and Syria, but now also parts of Yemen, Libya and elsewhere, but you need different strategies based on traditions in different countries.

What I'd like to advance is the idea that in Iraq we need roughly two to three times as many U.S. troops as we have now. Instead of 3,000 to 3,500 or the 4,000

that Mr. Obama seems headed towards plus or minus I'm in favor of something in the range of 7,000 to 10,000.

Also I believe that instead of simply advising and training at the central locations where we are today, we're going to have to get down to the brigade level and not do fighting for these Iraqis in the overwhelming majority of cases but do on the ground advising because counter-insurgency is tough and that's the fight they've got coming and they are not quite ready for it. There are only two specific things I wanted to respond to in regard to what Senator Murphy said. And I think generally speaking I would agree with a lot of his assessments but there are two points I want to challenge. One is that somehow we failed to train the Iraqi military after 10 years. In technical terms that military wound up a lot better. The problem is the politics all fell apart after we left and this is not a big critique of President Obama who I think actually tried to stay, and stayed for three years during his first term when he had said he would only stay for 16 months and he essentially followed the Bush Administration schedule for leaving so I am not trying to make some kind of harsh critique of what Mr. Obama was trying to do in Iraq but it's the politics that fell apart. Prime Minister Malaki turned out to be a bad guy and if you want me to keep trying to throw arrows in all directions, let me say that it was the Bush Administration that thought that he was the right guy and they promoted him and they were wrong. Or maybe they were right for a few minutes and then wrong for a long time after that because Malaki had a brief heyday during the surge and then he turned out to be a guy who tore the country apart.

That's the real failure that we've had and the Obama Administration therefore was correct to make their first order of business last summer convincing the Iraqi's to get rid of Malaki. But now we are going to hope that someone even better than a body is out there if only we're patient and wait no. What's going to happen if we wait is

that a body is going to fall, because he's going to fail. Therefore we have to actually get after this and the Syria piece of this is so difficult that we have to get progress and momentum going in Iraq. So I think we can do that with roughly two to three times the number of people and as I've said being more forward, using air power as we are already, we've already crossed that threshold. We may have to use it a little bit more in certain specific fights in the cities, here is one piece that I know will be controversial and here I'm a little bit more forward leaning than some of my fellow teammates in this broader debate. I don't know if Michael is exactly in my camp on this but I believe we should actually preposition American special operations for ISIS for direct action at a moment of our and the Iraqi's choosing once we are ready for a major counteroffensive against ISIL which will probably be next year not this year. I would like to see joint special operations command help in some very hard hitting and blitzkrieg style special operations, where we actually seize the initiative and don't just do this through incrementalism. I am in favor of having 2,000 to 3,000 American special operations forces involved in several weeks worth of rates in conjunction with the Iraqis once the moment is right, but the moment isn't right now.

And let me finish on a political point. Again to support Mr. Obama's general strategy politics come first in Iraq. I agree with Senator Murphy on that too. The way we have to take this to the next level it so help the Iraqis and push them to create the Iraqi national guard that's going to allow the Sunni tribesman and some of the members of some Shiite Militias and a number of other Iraqis who presently do not want to join the Iraqi Army or police to have some role in this fight, because right now we are unable to attract enough recruits, the Iraqis are not able to bring enough people into their ranks, the whole things has petered out. We got off to a good start last year with this strategy and it's petered out and now if anything ISIL has the upper hand slightly again in Iraq.

I think by doubling to tripling our forces, having advisors more forward, being willing to do some special operations raids over a short period when the time is right and really pushing the Iraqis to take the national guard concept to the next level so they can bring Sunni tribesman and other Shia into a concept where they can fight and defend their own homelands. Not some general notion of an integrated Iraq that I admit and agree is not really there to be defended right now. But their own homelands with American support for the creation and training of that national guard I think we'll be much better off, thank you.

(Applause)

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Thank you, Mike. That's terrific. Next up as you know is Jeremy Shapiro. Jeremy is a fellow with the project on International Order and Security in the foreign policy program at Brookings and he's a former Obama administration official in the policy planning department and state department.

MR. SHAPIRO: Thank you, thanks for coming and I'd like to say that I guess following up on Mike, I respect their position and I guess doing the math I agree with 10 percent of what he says. There are two basic reasons in my view why large U.S. ground forces are a bad idea in the fight against ISIS. The first is that they are not necessary. The second is that they won't work and they'll even be counterproductive. First, why aren't they necessary? ISIS has clearly demonstrated a lot of tactical and operational proficiency, but they are not 10 feet tall, they have many weaknesses. Foremost among them is that everybody hates them. The west hates them, the Kurds have them, the Iranians hate them, the Sunni powers hate them and recently anyone governed by them hates them. Even Al Qaida hates them. This is an impressive list of enemies even by middle-eastern standards and it really helps explain why ISIS had demonstrated no capacity to expand beyond Sunni-Arab areas.

They are hopelessly outnumbered by their Shia and Kurdish enemies and facing arrestive and angry Sunni population to govern. These enemies in combination with coalition air power mean that they're expansion is already effectively limited to the Sunni-Arab areas of Iraq and Syria. They are stuck in a war of attrition they can't hope to win even if they can hold on for a very long time. In the meantime they are not capable or really even interested in attacks on the United States despite much heated rhetoric to the contrary. Since 9-11 I would say we have become extremely effective at preventing terrorist attacks that emanate from abroad in this country. Despite the endless predictions of such attacks our homeland security system is working and we should appreciate the cushion of security that it provides. ISIS ideology of course could inspire individuals within the United States and let's face it, as the events in Charleston this week demonstrate so tragically we have a huge problem with isolated angry young men despite whatever ideology resorting to violence and terrorism.

But a recent FBI report documents that -- documented 160 mass shootings over the last 13 years in the United States resulting in nearly 500 deaths. None had any operational connection abroad, only two both loan wolves were inspired by foreign Islamist ideology. ISIS could disappear tomorrow or it could take Baghdad tomorrow and it wouldn't appreciably change this problem. We should do something about this violence but invading Iraq or Syria is not it. The second point is that U.S. ground forces will not solve the problem that ISIS represents.

All agree that ISIS is a symptom of the political and sectarian struggles in Iraq and Syria. U.S. ground troops can likely inflict military defeats on ISIS but to what purpose? Let's recall we just spent nine years occupying Iraq with ground forces fruitlessly trying to create the inclusive political order that Mike wants and in process spawning ISIS from U.S. military prisons. Without progress by local actors on the political

front, defeating ISIS militarily will mean nothing. Another perhaps worse group will simply arise. Of course various people in Washington - a lot of them named Mike - will tell you that now we understand the mistakes of the past, that now we know how to create an inclusive political order in Iraq and Syria, that the problem is the stupidity of the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration, that all we have to do is support this politician or arm this militia. That now after more than a decade of trying and more than 25 million dollars in tax payer money we have got the politics right so we can train an effective Iraqi security air forces that won't crumble or Syrian opposition forces that won't betray us.

I say buyer beware. This is not just a question of political will or strategy. The record of U.S. engineering efforts, political engineering efforts in the middle-east is quite dismal. In this case the fundamental problem is that besides the Kurds we lack effective allies in both Iraq and Syria and we cannot rebuild these states by ourselves. We have to acknowledge that the United States does not come to these countries without baggage. We have a long and troubled history in the region and we've invaded or occupied or bombed 12 Islamic countries in the broader region since 1980 with precious little good will to show for it.

Listen to the views of our most recent hope for an effective Sunni ally in Iraq, Prime Minister Abadi whom the U.S. helped to put into power last year. On the very question of U.S. ground troops he said, "We don't want them, we don't allow them full stock." Any foreign ground troops on Iraqi soil will be treated as enemy troops. That's out ally. Our enemies and they are legion in Iraq and Syria will probably be even less hospitable. In short, U.S. ground forces are not necessary to deal with the problem of ISIS, they are not capable of dealing with the problem that ISIS represents and they might make the problem worse. (Applause)

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I appreciate the discipline gentleman. Other than

Mike Doran's -- I've got my eye on you. I definitely have my eye on you. All right, so now comes -- fantastic opening arguments both side, thank you, gentleman and we are now going to move over to a section that I'm going to keep tight at 25 minutes where we are going to sort of have discussions and arguments amongst our panelists. I'm going to pick out some of the things that struck me when I was listening and I did not know what these gentleman were going to be saying before they said it. I'm just going to say what was coming to my mind and I was struck by something that Senator Murphy said about what is the objective for the United States in Iraq and Syria, are we trying to defeat or degrade ISIS?

And the Senator said that our objective should be to degrade, so I'd like someone from the other team to take that up. Is that the correct objective?

MR. DORAN: No, the objective is to defeat ISIS and the President said that we should degrade and ultimately defeat and when the President of the United States makes such a statement it should have an effect. It should have an effect on our enemies and it should have an effect on our allies and it should be immediate.

There is a very serious prestige issue here when the President of the United States says that he's going to go out to defeat a force of 20,000 to 30,000 guys nasty guys with pick-up trucks puts together a coalition of some 60 members and starts bombing them and after eight months shows no appreciable effect. It's very dangerous for the prestige of the United States and the middle-east and across the region. And one of the problems that we have as a result of that is that our allies start to assume that we cannot do the job and they make choices of their own which are as damaging to us as some of the choices that our enemies are making.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay, Senator Murphy that's a powerful argument that it's our prestige as a nation that is at stake and that people aren't going to take us

seriously in the middle-east, neither our friends nor our enemies if we don't stand up and put our money where our mouth is. What do you say to that?

SENATOR MURPHY: Well is our prestige greater today than before the war in Iraq? Do we have more friends in the region than we did prior to putting in 100's of 1,000's of troops in the region? Are interests advanced because of the mistakes we made, of course not. We lost prestige through the mistakes that were inherent in a strategy that believe that the United States military could ultimately solve political problems underground in the middle-east. Now it is my desire that the Red Sox win tonight, but it is not my objective because ultimately it's the players on the field that are going to determine as to whether or not the Red Sox win. That's why I'm saying today that I freely admit that it is my desire that ISIL is ultimately eliminated and I can be as a United States Senator a participant and someone who provides an assist in that overall effort. But it's the decision of leaders on the ground in the territory that ISIS operates in and occupies as to whether they are ultimately eliminates. So that's why I think it is important to talk about the distinctions and talk about what the United States has control over and what we don't, because I think that the damage that we have done to our prestige over the last 10 years is rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of what we have control over as a nation and in particular what our United States military has control over.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, the Senator makes a powerful argument that we can't just wish for something to happen and make it be so, that the long painful history in Iraq under George W. Bush showed us that that didn't work, so Mike I'm struck by the use of the word ultimately, that we want to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL and I wonder whether the side -- the other side is essentially kicking the can down the road. Is the President himself kicking the can down the road? If he says ultimately we know he

is not going to be in office for that much longer, is this going to become the next President's problem and take that up?

MR. O'HANLON: I think we all know that this will be the next President's concern as well regardless of our descriptions for what that President might have to do. I would be content to see the situation in Iraq changing dramatically by the end of the Obama administration with some inroads in Syria. I think that is a realistic goal. I also think that frankly, it's necessary because I think Jerry did a brilliant job of correctly noting that we have not suffered attacks on the homeland from ISIL or Al Qaida in any substantial size or magnitude since 9-11 but I don't take that as a given indefinitely. I don't -- I think we've gotten lucky a few times.

We've had a few attacks but the way, some of which didn't work out so well for the attacker. Like the underwear bomber on 2009, that might have. We've also Charlie Etto attack inspired not by ISIL but by Al Qaida perhaps with a broader Jihadist movement in France. We've seen the possibility of Lone Wolf attacks in the United States and most of all there is a very distinct possibility that Astad is going to fall this year due to ISIL, I'm not going to cry too much over that development if it happens, but I am going to worry about what ISILs ambitions become next.

Is it going to be Jordan? Are they going to try to sneak in assassination teams against a middle-east leader that we value. Are they going to start thinking about attacking Baghdad? Or Kazhikstan in Iraq like they tried last year. I think the idea of assuming that this is contained and containable indefinitely at the current level of effort is a big assumption. We don't know that's correct. If it were correct then we could trade off our humanitarian concern for the Syrian people and our responsibility to protect under U.N. and humanitarian law against our desire not to send American men and women into combat and that would be a tough debate. But I worry about where this

threat could go in the next year to three years and I think we better not assume that for five to ten more years of it burning out we are going to be okay through that whole process.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Jeremy five to ten more years, take yourself a little bit into the future, you made the argument that everybody hates ISIS. That including Al Qaida who kicked them out and said you're too mean to be in our terrorist club, you've got to guy, if everyone hates ISIS so much why haven't they gone away. Why haven't they been defeated? I didn't hear in your argument where you said how they are going to be defeated just because everyone hates them.

MR. SHAPIRO: Thank, and the Red Sox are going to win tonight. So that's a prediction I'll make, but why hasn't ISIS been defeated yet? I don't really know, I think that one of the things that we should have learned from our experience in Iraq and Syria that we don't really very well understand the dynamics on the ground, there is as people have said a lot of Sunni resentment against -- different stories in Iraq and Syria so I can run through them but in Iraq there is a lot of Sunni resentment against the Shiite government and they were willing to even accept the idea of an ISIS conquest as perhaps superior to the Shiite government that they felt was oppressing them in Iraq. I think by now ISIS has disabused them of that view. In Syria they simply profited from the dynamics of the Syrian Civil War and the confusion that was there.

I don't mean to underestimate ISIS, I think that they have accomplished a lot more than anybody thought they could and they have demonstrated particularly a lot of tactical and operational proficiency. But we have a tendency as a country, as an analytical community to sort of see a trend and to project it off into the future.

And trends don't usually go that way. Usually they contain the seeds of their own ending. And might say maybe ISIS will conquer Libya and Yemen and Saudi

Arabia and maybe there will be an attack next year in the United States sponsored by them. I can't 100 percent rule these things out but analytically it's not likely and I'd like to base our policy on not the worst case scenario. I can understand what Ron Suskind called the one percent doctrine, but on what I think is actually likely to happen.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, Michael Doran you have referred in your writing to this subject as being similar to Eisenhower doing a head fake doing the Dien Bien Foo Crisis and even though he coined the term the Domino Theory, you say that he wasn't actually urging American intervention he was trying to do everything to ensure it didn't happen. So tell us about the other Vietnam Term, Mission Creep. So how do we know that if we start sending these American troops as spotters or some fighters that it's not going to get completely out of control like I think you agreed the Iraq War did?

MR. DORAN: That's a great question, thanks. I think the key issue there is allies. Jeremy is being disingenuous when he says we don't know why a coalition of 60 forces and why all of the states who hate ISIS haven't succeeded in destroying ISIS. The answer is simple. The Sunnis need to know, the Sunnis on the ground in Iraq, on the ground in Syria and surrounding Sunni states, they need to understand that the war against ISIS is going to result in a regional order that protects their vital interests and that doesn't benefit Iran.

And when they look at the trend lines and when they look at the trend lines of U.S. Policy across the region they believe that if they participate wholeheartedly in the U.S. project against ISIS, they are going to be handing the region to Iran.

Until we convince the Sunnis of the states of the the region and the Sunnis on the ground that we have their interests in mind then the only option that we are going to have in the event of a severe crisis is unilateral U.S. action of a massive kind. If we want to have any other leverage to use to throw at this problem we have to generate

allies. It is generating allies that allows us to avoid Mission Creep but that requires a certain amount of American military commitment.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: When you say of a massive kind define how many U.S. troops need to be there.

MR. DORAN: I go with what Mike said, I would probably put it a little bit higher. But we're talking about --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: He said 7,000 to 10,000.

MR. DORAN: We're talking about four or five times what we've got now, but partly because I want to be very careful because I recognize -- one of the reasons why President Obama doesn't actually want to do what he says he's doing is that he fears that if he starts to actually make serious inroads against ISIS on the ground in Iraq it is going to be threatening to the Shiite militias dominated by Iran and Iran is going to start taking retribution against us.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: We are going down the Iran rabbit hole.

MR. DORAN: In addition to the forces that Mike wants to put in place we have some extra for forced protection purposes.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: You're talking about 12,000 to 15,000 is the general number you are giving. Okay, Senator Murphy, I'm struck by the passion with which you talk about how we can't make the same mistakes that we made in the Iraq War under George W. Bush and how strongly you've advocated even to the point of getting an amendment on to the NDAA, into the Defense Authorization I believe, an amendment that would bar American troops on the ground and I had heard that you were also seeking a similar amendment on some other legislation.

But it's interesting because a wide array of polls, recently -- consistently show that American do support U.S. military action and boots on the ground against ISIS

so how do you justify your opposition to this -- to your own constituents and other American voters?

SENATOR MURPHY: Listen my constituents in Connecticut are very scared of ISIS and rightly so. I mean we haven't seen this kind of vicious, in human, unconscionable behavior in a long time, certainly not on our TVs every night. And I do believe that they are a threat to the United States and maybe not in credible attacks that are being planned today, but certainly to the extent they get control of the large swath of territory there uncontested. They've made it clear that the United States would be in their sites, so that's why I actually support a robust mission to degrade them to the point where they don't have an impact against the United States.

Those polls also have one thing in common which is that they only give the American people one option which is put American troops on the ground. There isn't an alternative in those polls. I would argue that if you asked an alternative question which proposed a strategy in which the United States is providing the air cover and training as we are today for the Iraqi forces that we have a realistic strategy to provide an economic answer to the marginalization of those in Sunni areas.

That they would support that before they would support a ground troop, but they only get one choice and when faced with do nothing against this vicious enemy or support ground troops some of these polls suggest they support ground troops. And so I just think everything we should be thinking about is in terms of how we solve the political vacuum on the ground and I don't think that we've had a real honest conversation with American voters about an alternative plan to troop deployment that does that.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: The Senator is admonishing all the pollster's among you to design better polls with better questions that aren't so binary. The Senator

also in his opening remarks Mike O'Hanlon talked about how the best tool for recruitment for ISIS is more U.S. troops. That there is no single better advertisement for them. That they can put it out on social media and draw even more than the thousands of foreign fighters who are coming now. That's a pretty powerful argument, that we are only going to make ISIS stronger if we put us troops on the ground.

MR. O'HANLON: Empirically I think that that was true in Iraq in the worst of the civil war period but I think it's not been true in the Syrian Civil War where roughly 1,000 foreign jihadists from nearly 100 countries have been flocking to this country every month for the last couple of years in the absence of an American presence on the ground. And much of the reason and I've learned this from my good friends at our Brookings Stowhouse Center like (inaudible) who is here tonight and Charles Lister and Will McKann is here from Brookings, there is this notion of this sort of mythical romantic great apocalyptic fight that is going to happen in Syria where fundamentalist Islam is going to defeat it's enemies and that's why they began with the name ISIS or ISIL.

There's something about this fight that is special to them. This place that's special to them and we're not part of the draw. They're still bringing in 1,000 people a month without us there. Personally, I don't find that argument compelling one way or the other because it's true that we did help draw them in Iraq but we're not the ones that are helping draw them to Syria. I just start with a clean sheet of paper and I say can we design a mission that does, in response to your earlier question, the Senator's very valid concerns prevent the likelihood or the potential of Mission Creep.

And this 7,000 to 10,000 number that I've been advocating tonight for Iraq, I calculated a year and a half ago before we sent the first 3,000 and I stood by it and I still think it's the right number because it's enough to put advisors in the field at the brigade level, do tactical air control and have some special forces. And if it doesn't work

quickly and if it takes a while then I'm enough with Jeremy's argument, believe it or not, that I would be patient because I agree that Jeremy and the Senator are right that we actually have to make Iraqis do this for themselves and if their politics aren't in a place where they can do 95 percent of the fighting, we're just going to have to be as patient as we possibly can.

But it's scary to be patient in dealing with ISIL. It's scary. I'm a little scared everyday about what they might do next and I think we have to get away from the notion that just because yesterday was relatively tranquil for the west that I personally do not agree with Jeremy's argument that what's happened in the last few weeks is the best predictor of what will happen in the next few weeks and the soundest basis for policy. ISIL has a very ambitious goal. That's why they call themselves the Islamic state. They want to be a caliphate throughout the broader middle-east region and someday they may in addition escalate their attempted attacks against the west.

SENATOR MURPHY: Michael has been generous to concede to some of our points, so let me tell you the most persuasive of his which is this idea that the way in which you influence the central government in Baghdad to make the concessions necessary to build political inclusiveness is to embed more forces with Iraqis. I understand that argument. I understand that argument and I understand why it's persuasive to some. The question is how much more influence do you get by moving from \$3,000 to just \$10,000. And are there other ways to gain that influence?

I'm not saying there are the votes for this in the United States Congress but if you were to propose to a body, a multi-billion dollar economic development plan that he could have some say and oversight over in Sunni areas would that be enough to make him consider those concessions. But I grapple with this question of whether or not we can force them to make these decisions without a greater number of troops and if I

was ever to believe the opposite of my argument that would likely be the reason why I'd get there.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Do you want to give a very quick response to Mike's point that he didn't buy your argument that more U.S. troops would actually be a recruitment tool for ISIS, do you have any empirical evidence that it has been?

SENATOR MURPHY: You clearly know that it wasn't Iraq and he's right. We have evidence to suggest that when Americans enter the middle-east it dramatically increases the numbers of people that want to come and fight. And to the extent that ISIS is building this expectation that Syria is going to be the end all and be all of the fight for a caliphate in between their brand of Islam and the rest of the world, there is nothing that could be a better advertisement for the filming of that dream than the United States having significant combat troops on the ground.

But again I will concede that they haven't had to wait for that thus far. I don't necessarily think that the fact that they have had other reasons to recruit people into the fight should be a reason for us to ignore the very clear, historical evidence that tells us that we are just fuel not water to that fire.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Jeremy your debate partner took the prerogative of being a Senator to jump in there but I won't forget you, we'll come back to you on the next round. Okay, Mike Doran. Even Senator Mitch McConnell opposes U.S. boot to fight in Iraq and Syria. Even he says, "No, we need local boots on the ground." So, find a prominent politician who aside from John McCain, who unequivocally support the idea of sending U.S. troops into Iraq. We really have to look to an ex-president George W. Bush who's come out on the record saying this. The entire fiasco in Iraq, with the Iraq War how can we trust his judgement or yours? I'm not debating, I'm just asking.

MR. DORAN: You can trust my judgment because we had very

significant experience and we learn from our mistakes in Iraq and as I said in my opening comments we learn from the surge. The surge is a tremendous and it showed that -- middle eastern populations have this broad -- we talk about them in these broad -- these broad categories like Sunnis and Shiites. But their politics is profoundly local in the end. And what we found is that when we embed people with local forces who are fighting for their homes and their locales and we engage with them frequently and we engage with them steadily, we develop viable allies that can help them with enemies like this. And it was that learning experience that the Bush administration went through that allowed the Bush to turn the war around in Iraq.

But President Obama learned completely different lessons in Iraq and he came to the kind of conclusions that Sarah Palin and our colleagues across the aisle here came to and as a result of that we see the situation going from bad to worse. The trend lines -- as Mike mentioned -- all of us who think this way mentioned a year ago that if we don't take action the situation is going to get worse. And people who think like Jeremy said don't worry about it. And in fact it's gotten worse. And according to a Gallup poll in March a decisive majority of Americans want boots on the ground in Iraq and Syria, so opinion has changed.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, well don't influence our audience here. We'll see what our own audience thinks after this debate. Jeremy, Mike Doran says he and other Bush Administration official learned from their mistakes, so we've got some rehabilitative policy makers here, so you tell us, you worked in the policy planning department at state and if boots on the ground are such a bad idea, why didn't you guys come up with some alternatives that could work?

MR. SHAPIRO: I think I mentioned in my opening talk that a guy named Mike would tell us that he had learned the lessons and we now knew what to do. I feel a

little bit vindicated. I think it's important to understand when sort of hearing this idea that the surge was -- had sort of peace and Jeffersonian ideals to Iraq before Obama ruined it, that what really the surge accomplished. I saw a quote from a retired lieutenant Daniel Bolger who just wrote a book why we lost, the general's inside account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. He said the surge didn't win anything, it bought time.

It helped reduce violence, but it created no political reconciliation and so it was just biding time. I think what we are talking about here is that we don't have the capacity to do the political engineering that we all agree is necessary and that military forces as Senator Murphy has been emphasizing are not the way to accomplish that if there is anyway. And so in the absence of that what we can do is send in forces, we can pay the very steep cost for doing that, we can perhaps reduce violence over time but we are unlikely to push to that political reconciliation. As a matter of fact we may well make it worse and we may be back in the same situation we are.

I don't think of that as having learned the lessons of the past few years. I like to think that when we say generals often fight the last war, we are talking metaphorically, but in this case we are actually talking about literally fighting the last war.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Mike O'Hanlon you wrote last month -- you called for training and equipping anti Assad forces in Syria even those who you yourself called questionable actors. Some of those questionable actors of course are ideologically close to ISIS, this group that we want to defeat. I want to understand exactly how your policy plan works. How is it that by helping those people are we not just cutting off our nose to spit our face helping ISIS get stronger?

MR. O'HANLON: Well, again my good friend Salmon Shalus taught me a lot about the Syrian opposition as have other scholars and it's a very complex shifting group of -- shifting collection of many groups and I think it's very hard to figure out which

ones are going to be dependable partners over time. I can see that point. But I also think that we've applied at least two or three different threshold and only one of which I think is completely valid and when we try to vet forces or groups that we would operate with. The threshold that I do agree with is the notion that if somebody is of an Al Qaida like philosophy that we can't work with them. And I'm completely on board that El Lusera and any remnants or elements of ISIL cannot be parts of the United States.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So who are the questionable element?

MR. O'HANLON: The ones who fought with the bad guys temporarily because there was no other way to stay alive on the battle field because the United States did not back up its promises to come help its allies and meanwhile everybody else did help their allies. Those people have to be forgiven or at least given a second chance, because staying alive is allowable.

Making a decision to tactically stay alive because you are otherwise overwhelmed and therefore you may have to temporarily affiliate with some pretty nasty groups. That's something you have to be willing to think about and give people a second chance. A vetting program that applies to both those standards, both those thresholds against which any group would have to pass before it can be entered into an American training program is simply unrealistic and the wrong way to go.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay, Senator Murphy last one in this round before we turn to the audience questions. Quickly take up for us, in your remarks you talked about the missions that these gentleman on the other side of the stage are advocating is just not feasible and that the whole 10 long years of the Iraq War shows were not good at what it is that they want to do, but I want to hear from you really what your plan is for how the Iraqis on the ground or these punitive Syrians on the ground who we don't even know who our real allies are in Syria as Michael O'Hanlon concedes how

are we going to find these people that are actually going to degrade and defeat ISIS so that they are not a threat to us?

SENATOR MURPHY: First and I think it's important to set the right expectations. I mean I think to demand that the United States be able to have a coherent plan -- to defeat ISIL in Iraq and Syria without serious partners as I would argue we don't have now is difficult if not impossible. And so the construct can't be if you don't have a coherent winning non-military plan that you can articulate today then we have to put in ground troops. That can't be a good position but I will just say this.

I actually have supported the President's insertion of so far up to 4,000 troops and I have confidence that we are not on the slippery slope so long as President Obama is in office. What I would have like to have seen is a little more hard bargaining before the insertion of those troops and what I mean by that is this a moment of leverage that we could have used to try to get a body to do the things that he's been telling us he's going to do for a long time like stand up a Sunni National Guard.

Something that the foreign relations committee has been told is just on the precipice of happening for the entire two and a half years that I've been on the committee. Or I'd like us to make a real commitment to the other kinds of assistance that really make a difference. It's ridiculous that we are now on the verge of letting the world food program run out of money for the second time in a row. This is the program that fees all the Syrian refugees, that provides them an alternative to signing up with ISIS who would give them a paycheck and a handful of square meals for them and their family.

But we aren't even talking about making a full commitment to that program either. If you are driving a harder bargain to make them make the political choices necessary, if you are funding the kind of humanitarian program that undercuts ISIL and you are being a military partner to the extent that I think is practical which is air

campaigns, limited on the ground training, not putting the U.S. Troops at risk, all of which would be by the way authorized by the limitation on ground forces that I proposed because it has built in a bunch of these exceptions, then I think ultimately that's a plan that can keep ISIS on the run to the extent that political decisions can be made to ultimately eliminate them. But it starts with being honest about what your capabilities are and what your objective are.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Very timely your reference to the AUMF, I think you were actually discussing that on the hill right before coming here which is why we started a little bit late but we can give the Senator a pass on that since he was actually dealing with policy on the very issue that we are debating. We are going to turn over to the audience now. I'm going to reset my trusty timer. So, I've got my eye on you guys too. Let's open it up. If you have a question raise your hand, wait until the microphone comes to you and then please identify yourself and your affiliation and please remember we need concise questions from you. It needs to be a question, not a statement or I'll have to redirect. Let's start with Syeed.

MR. ARKAT: I'm a Palestinian journalist but I also spent five years in Iraq during the surge time and I can tell you no amount of troops would really impact the situation on the ground. My question is to Senator Murphy, I believe and all indications are that to really defeat and degrade ISIS is for the United States to pressure its allies in the Gulf States and Turkey to stop aiding, financing and arming these groups. Why not introduce legislation or political efforts, whatever you want to call that in the United States Senate, in Congress, to actually do just that, to pressure the GCC countries, to pressure Turkey to quit aiding and arming ISIS. Thank you.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Senator.

SENATOR MURPHY: One of the ways in which we have been

successful in degrading ISIS has been through that very initiative. Now I don't claim that we have cut off all of their sources of funding, but there has been a significant immunization of those sources of funding because of the pressure that we have leveraged. Absolutely, I wouldn't disagree with you. I think that is a perfectly appropriate way for the United States Congress to take a more fulsome role than we have is stepping up to the plate and putting more pressure on those countries to do the right things.

But you see evidence in which the leaders of the Senate are moving in the opposite direction. We had a proposal last week for the United States to begin directly arming the Kurds. Now there is a lot of reasons why you should provide arms to the Kurds but there are other means to do that other than giving it directly to the Kurdish state which by the way would create enormous problems in Turkey which would undercut your efforts to try to get Turkey to work with you on other problems in the regions.

I do think that we have to have an overall strategy that gets more buy-in from our regional partners. Sometimes I don't think we see the big picture and when we think we are helping somebody like the Kurds we don't understand that ultimately we might be frustrating some of our other goals in and around the region with our partner. No, I don't let my colleagues off the hook for perhaps not using pressure points that we could for those reasons.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: We're going to take another question and please also tell us to whom you are directing it and which team and they can decide amongst themselves. The young lady. Please identify yourself.

MS. MARIE: My name is Eva Marie, I'm a student at Bart College and captain of the debate team there.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: You can give these guys pointers afterwards. Take them aside, give them any tips, they'll appreciate it.

MS. MARIE: My question is for the affirmative side which promotes boots on the ground. We've seen a lot of dissension over whether putting forces on the ground will increase Islamic state recruitment. But looking more towards the longer term, how do you address Senator Murphy's argument that even in the best case scenario of IS is defeated a new group will step in. How do you break the cycle of intervention, extremism and terrorism through boots on the ground?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay, from the affirmative side she's holding your boots to the fire, let's hear it.

MR. O'HANLON: The cycle of extremism that we see is partially the result of us pulling back. If we don't -- if the United States doesn't step in and present the states of the region -- and particularly the Sunni states of the region a vision of regional order that can take care of their security challenges and that will safeguard their vital interests then they turn to the tools that they have at their disposal to take care of their problem. One of those tools -- I disagree with the previous question that the Gulf states are really supporting ISIS I have lots of information about where ISIS money and recruitment comes from. And it's not coming directly from the Gulf states. But one of the tools that the surrounding states do have is they turn a blind eye to what's going in that territory. They don't really do enough to stop it because if their choice is between ISIS and Iran dominated middle-east then they are not going to come to our aid and they are going to leave the field open to the these Jihadees.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, another question. Yes, sir.

MR. MOOSA: Hi, my name is Akman Moosa, I'm a graduate student at the Middlebury Institute and question for the Mike's. I guess I have two questions. The second one is more important to me, but 1) one why not just use airstrikes more effectively in Iraq and Syria and 2) if we were to put U.S. Troops in Syria and their

primary objective was to fight ISIS what happens when they run into other groups, for example, Joe Patinostra. Especially when those groups, you know, Joe Lani in his Al Jazeera interview said that Jane's not interested right now in fighting the west. Couldn't that change that mentality?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Michael O'Hanlon can you take that one?

MR. O'HANLON: Two things. First we didn't talk a lot about details of any of our Syria plans, but I would not suggest putting in a lot of U.S. Forces to be the primary combatants in Syria, the main place where I think I disagree from the other team is I would support once we have an opposition that can establish a foothold and survive with that foothold, probably starting with the Kurds in the north, adding American special forces to then accelerate the training that you would try to use to expand that group's hold and over time all it to expand its foothold and do that ideally in conjunction with our regional allies, some of whom should also be willing to put in such special forces. That's essentially what I'm arguing in regards to Syria. In regard to air campaigns let me just bring you back to the Kosovo War. In 1999 we bombed -- we did some pin pricks then we picked it up a bit. We went from a few dozen airplanes to a few hundred airplanes, still no way to win the war from the air. We were flying at a certain altitude that we higher perhaps than what we're flying now, the bottom line is we are just trying to use air power in this antiseptic, wonderful way from stand off. It's not very good, especially in a group like ISIL, because what won the Kosovo War was ultimately targeting parts of Belgrade that Milosovich was not looking for happiness in the afterlife so much as power and money in this life, what he valued. And we went after him and his cronies and what they held.

ISIL is going to be a lot harder to target and dissuade in that way. You are going to have to beat them on the ground. The question is how do we get regional

partners ready to do that fight for themselves with American help. That's I think what we would all agree on. I just think it's going to take more American help and a little bit more in the way of numbers and risk than the other side.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: America has the leading edge.

MR. O'HANLON: Not the leading edge.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Not the leading edge or the example.

MR. O'HANLON: It's primarily a catalyst to the training. Then we do some direct raids with them in a limited phase.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Let me ask the negative team, is it okay with you if Mike Doran makes a point? All right, go for it.

MR. DORAN: All I wanted to mention is that Mike was very modest and he didn't mention that he has a paper on Syria that goes into detail on some of this on Brookings website.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, #Brookings Debate. Yes, I see a question in the back.

MR. STEELE: Hi, I'm Colin Steele and I work at Georgetown and I have two questions for the "anti" side, especially Mr. Shapiro and this is first could you talk a little bit about your analysis of U.S. social resilience in terms of our ability to control our own fears, essentially. And secondly talk a little bit about what specifically we must absolutely prevent and that gets a little bit to the distinction between what don't we like in terms of humanitarian crisis and what must we absolutely prevent that's -- for example capturing WMD or taking over Baghdad for example. Thank you.

MR. SHAPIRO: Those are pretty broad questions. I'll try to attack them a little bit. The question of social resilience I think is a really important one and maybe you've been reading it but I've been writing on that a little bit and it seems to me that that

is the fundamental problem we have. That on a certain level we externalize these problems because our politicians don't want to deal with trying to tell people, you know, you have to bare up to some of these problems.

And so it's very easy to sort of say well what we're going to do to deal with terrorism is to send the military abroad and the U.S. military is something we can have faith in and it will get the job done and it seems like a response that obviates our need to sit around and think about how much violence can we actually absorb? What are we actually willing to take? We've never had that debate. The standard is one of absolute protection. I think that that has made our debate a little bit difficult to have here. In terms of your question about what we absolutely must prevent. I think that we do have vital interests in the middle-east. In the first instance is preventing terrorist attacks from coming to our shores. I think we have that fairly well in hand, but it's certainly something that we absolutely must prevent even if we can't be 100 percent successful.

And I think that we also have critical interests in the flow of energy which I think is also well in hand but as a critical interest I think we also have a critical interest in the security of Israel and we have critical interest in nuclear non-proliferation. Those are the sort of four critical interests that have been generally articulated. It's very easy for me to imagine protecting all of those interests with a strategy that we've talked about which is focused on long term degradation of ISIS. I don't see them as fundamentally at risk at this point. It's always an effort.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Let me ask if we have any Twitter questions. Maybe think about it those of you who are watching online, who would want to send some Twitter questions in, in the meantime we are going to stick with the room. Yes, in the back there. The woman in the orange dress.

MS. TAYLOR: Hi, my name is Kathleen Taylor, I work with Grant

Thorton.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Who do you work for?

MS. TAYLOR: Grant Thorton, homeland security. My question is for the Mike's. How long do you see troops being needed in Iraq and also in Syria.

MR. O'HANLON: No matter whose strategy you adopt up here it's many years. And we are already fighting in Iraq and we are already fighting in Syria. It's pretty hard to stop fighting when the reasons for which you started to fight haven't changed and in fact have exacerbated and intensified. I would submit respectfully that the other side is talking about an indefinite war and I'm just talking about a very long one. I think their war will last -- there is no prospect that what we are doing now will ultimately contain or end this conflict.

The kinds of options that we've put forth I think are a two to three time horizon in Iraq and a three to five year time horizon in Syria followed by the likely deployment of an implementation force for a peace accord which I would support which would have to have American troops and which would incur casualties. And that force would probably have to be there for at least another five years after that. I don't have good news. That's why Doran wanted me to take the question.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: The gentleman here in the grey jacket please.

DR. TYBIDRE: Dr. Tybidre from Iraqi Mentor Magazine in Washington. So far we have 5,000 fighters, Sunni fighters in Kirkuk. They are willing to work with American, only American. And now we have a list from almost 6,000 guys. So far these guys are not willing to work with anybody. Now probably work in the future six months from now, seven month with everybody. But so far they only want to work with --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: What is your question and for whom?

DR. TYBIDRE: These fighters they are only asking to work with

American. What American could provide for them and just put everybody aside, thank you?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Which team should be taking that question? The affirmative team, okay.

MR. DORAN: That's great. That's how I understand the problem. We have significant manpower in waiting in Iraq to work with us if we'll make the decision and we will arm them, train them directly and work with them. One of the problems with what Senator Murphy said is basically his alternative is a non-alternative. Why? Because the Umani Government doesn't make the decisions in the security sector in Iraq. Iran makes those decisions. And it has taken over the security sector underneath the nose of the government. We can give billions of dollars for some kind of economic incentive program to the government and they would pocket it and Iran would still reap all the spoils because the Iranians have a gun to the head of the government.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Would any of you like to respond to that, Senator?

SENATOR MURPHY: How on earth does that solve the problem in the long run to have people that are willing to fight say that we have absolutely no faith, that we can do that in conjunction with the central government in Baghdad and so the Americans need to send thousands of troops here to partner with us. That will get you a temporary, local victory, a regional victory, but it doesn't solve any of the underlying long term problems and it's why I view the surge not very differently than the terms in which Jeremy used, it was successful on its terms for the period of time that it was there.

But when it wasn't there and I would argue that the transition was lacking for a lot of different reasons, but the minute that the surge wasn't there all of the military and economic stability was gone and so an offer from local fighters to only fight next to Americans really doesn't get you any closer to the time in which they are willing to fight

with those that are actually leading their country.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay, well unfortunately we are running out of time and we still need to have time to wrap up the closing argument on both sides. I just want to remind you that the polls are open once again and the same question applies. We are particularly interested in those of you who might have changed your opinion from before and after (inaudible) remarks should U.S. put boots on the ground to fight ISIS, you can vote again now and a reminder that the voting is only going to remain open until the second to the last finishes. So, remember to vote, okay, so Michael O'Hanlon you are up first, two minutes and I'm going to timing it.

MR. O'HANLON: And I'll try to go even faster, because I want to just be very start and direct on my conclusion which is that we've tried all sorts of options in the middle-east in the last 15 years. We've tried 100,000 plus troops and that didn't work so well and whether the surge worked or not the overall enterprise was obviously far too difficult with far too little pay off for the United States and whatever gains we achieved are largely lost or at least in great peril. We tried doing almost nothing which was our strategy in fact after we helped defeat Kadafi in Libya, President Obama himself has acknowledged that he made a mistake in not trying to do more there.

We've done virtually nothing in Syria. We've always tried to slow down our even covert aid programs. The history doesn't really help us too much. And I think we need to think about middle ground options. And they should be very, very intensively scrutinized and just because they sound like Clinton triangulation doesn't mean they are good ideas, I'll concede that point even though I'm trying to propose one tonight. And let me just simply sum up by saying on Iraq we have a government that is much better than the one before, but at least has the right instincts on political reconciliation and it has at least some pieces of its army holding together and thankfully with our limited application

of air power our President Obama as done a very good job in figuring out how to do that in a timely way, at least three fourths of the country is not under ISIL control.

Too much of it is influenced by Iran yes, but mentally three fourths of the country is okay. What we need to do now is help the Iraqis take that other one fourth back. The strategy that we've been following over the last year plus it worked pretty well at first. It has petered out. It is not working now. We need to do somewhat more. There is a definable path ahead that is specific and limited and we should get on with it. I'll focus on Iraq in my conclusion and stop there.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Thank you, Mike. So triangulating or not Mike seems to be staking out the middle ground. So Jeremy we're now going to hear your closing remarks.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, thank you. I appreciate Mike's effort not to make the same old mistakes and to make new mistakes. And in one of Mike Doran's interventions the probability, the possibility of Mission Creep in this -- the operation that they are proposing.

We've heard at the beginning essentially that, you know, we will be out in three months, a year, three years, whatever and then as things go badly the same arguments are sent back to us and they say well no we have this vital interest we can't let it fester, we have devoted too much to stop now so we have to escalate, we have to surge, we have to put in more troops and the truth is is that we don't see any path through this and we can see that as we sort of struggle with military disputes among actors on the ground that we don't really understand that we can change the dynamics, but that we don't have political engineering capacity to really create the political reconciliation that is necessary and we have to live with that.

And I think that this gets to one of the critical points that we've all hit on

which is the question of our allies, the fact of the matter is that what's going in Iraq and Syria is not fundamentally about the United States.

We are neither the problem nor the solution to what's happening in that area and our allies and our enemies alike all have their own agendas and broadly speaking they are not our agenda and they will follow those agendas much more strongly and we will because it's their place -- they are the local actors and I think that if we think that through the application of military force we are going to abandon the agendas of even our allies much less our enemies to what we want. I think we have not learned the right lessons from the last 10 or 12 years from that region.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay, Jeremy, so Jeremy says it's not about us. Mike Doran convince us that it is.

MR. SHAPIRO: No, I actually agree with again -- like Mike said, I agree with 90 percent of what Jeremy said. It's the last 10 percent that's problematic. There is a conversation that doesn't take place in Teheran when they look at -- or in Moscow when they look at what's going on in Syria, they don't say we don't have the capacity to influence what's happening. We don't really understand this place, we shouldn't try to do anything, we have doubled down on their ally Assad time and time again as he has carried out horrendous butchery, uprooting as I said near 10 million people -- killing 250,000 -- creating a problem that is going to be with us for years and years and for a generation to come. And as we have pulled back and done nothing they have been emboldened to continue that support.

DR. TYBIDRE: And as they have been emboldened our allies have seen no option but to intervene in ways that are detrimental to us. We can absolutely influence the agenda of our allies. We can generate allies who are willing to fight on the ground, to put their lives on the line in place of our own if we will support them. That was the

experience of the surge. All of the men who led the -- the Iraqis who led forces on the battle field together with us on the surge are now dead because we pulled back and we didn't support them. We can influence our allies, we can generate allies and we can influence our enemies.

Where I do agree with Jeremy is when he says that there is no clear way out of this, there is no clear solution, we're going to have a chaotic middle east for the rest of our lives. The question then is in a chaotic middle east how do we generate tools that allow us to protect our interest and protect the interest of our friends with a minimal amount of U.S. force. That's the question that we need to be asking ourselves.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, so Mike Doran says that the U.S. has to serve as a bullwark against Iran and Russia and Senator Murphy we're going to hear from you last. Imagine that you are delivering your two minutes on the Senate floor except if cocktails were served on the Senate floor so think that way and I just want to remind the audience that this is it. This is your last chance to vote, so take it away Senator.

SENATOR MURPHY: My skepticism about combat troops in the middle-east has its foundation in this simple premise that America is empirically terrible at influencing political stability in the middle-east with the blunt force of American military power. That's the lesson of the last 15 years. I heard plan after plan, rewrite after rewrite as to how we were going to do better, get things right in Afghanistan and Iraq. Virtually none of them came true. Why is that? It's because you don't beat a tactic with a Navy, you don't defeat a ideology with an air force, you don't stamp out economic dislocation with an army.

And this debate that we're having here, which I'm thrilled to be a part of is at the same time the problem and the solution. It's the solution because we are having

a really amazing open debate about our options when I hope that we have in Congress. The reason I was late was because we were in the foreign relations committee having a members only debate over whether or not we should actually authorize this engagement in the first place.

That's a ridiculous debate to be having, it's our constitutional obligation to debate this but we don't because it's tough, because it's hard, because authority issues that we are confronting here are easily solved by a bunch of politicians. But this debate that we are having is the problem, because it perpetuates this mythology that the only relevant question about how we solve problems abroad is whether or not we deploy troops or not. There is a whole another set of interventions, not just with respect to how we stamp out ISIS but all of the other enemies around the world, we talk about in Ukraine only whether we arm or we don't arm the Ukrainian.

We've got to shift this conversation to all the other ways in which we can conduct ourselves, whether it be supporting economic development in at risk regions or starting to actually talk the talk and walk the walk when it comes to the values we preach around the world. There is a much more robust conversation that we can have about how we defeat ISIL and how we protect America abroad.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right, so Senator Murphy is urging us to think of alternatives to the actual question that we are debating today. Passionate, riveting, exciting, we'll see whether it was convincing. Thank you so much gentleman the polls are closed so I'd like to ask the audience and the panelists to stay in your seat while we are tabulating the votes and I will be back with the envelope shortly. (Applause)

I do have the envelope. The moment you've been waiting for. Drum roll. Before the debate here is how the audience votes, 35 percent of you felt that we should send in U.S. ground troops to fight ISIS in Iraq and Syria and 65 percent of you were

against, all right? Let's see after the debate 31 percent thought we should send I ground troops and 69 percent, so a higher number believe that we should not send in boots. Okay, so for an all ready waited in favor of the negative side they gained four points from their all ready very strong lead that people had as a let's say preconceived notion of people coming into this debate.

Now the thing that strikes me the most looking at these numbers is how different this room and our viewers online are from the norm in America, because the basic polling we've seen not last year, but since January of this year has turned. We've got a whole series of polls. The Quinnipiac poll that Doran referred to and a number of others where as recently as a couple of weeks ago we have a CNN poll and the Quinnipiac poll and a number of others that show Americans favoring ground troops and so I'm wondering whether that's because they haven't heard the arguments, are they not as informed as the people in this room or what -- or is it the way that the questions are constructed which is what the Senator had suggested that it may be the way that the polls are designed that it's pushing the answer in a certain direction.

And I'm also struck by the White House like any White House is concerned about polls and is concerned about what the American people think so I'm wondering if they have their own internal polling that is reassuring the President that Americans don't want boots on the ground even if some of the public polling is showing otherwise so we would also welcome to hear your thoughts on those -- on why the numbers came out this way so feel free to Tweet with the hashtag Brookings Debate and you can Tweet at Brookings Inst. or at Brookings FP for foreign policy. And I just want to thank everyone for turning out tonight, this packed audience and sticking with us all this time and for those of you watching online we are really excited that this was the first -- the inaugural debate and we think it was fun. We hope there will be more like this and we'd

love to hear your feedback on how it went tonight. Thanks, good night everyone.

(Applause)

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